The Builder.

No. CCXL.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1847.

KNOWLEDGE is power, wrote the great Lord Bacon. Knowledge is power, complacently exclaimed a dandy the other day, when, strong men having failed, he released a lap-dog from the teeth of a huge mastiff, by quietly administering to the latter a pinch of snuff! As knowledge even in one department spreads, so will crime be lessened, human suffering prevented, happiness be increased, and existence lengthened. Ignorance in matters sanatory slays its sixty thousand victims a year in the United Kingdom;—more than ten thousand of whom are taken from this wealthy, boastful, and enlightened metropolis alone; and knowledge, very simple knowledge would save them. Ignorance, besides, gives illness to 700,000 persons every year; and who will calculate the amount of sorrow, distress, waste of money, crime, and misery, which inevitably follow this death and sickness?* And all this will be prevented by knowledge, very simple knowledge. Knowledge is indeed power!

We say, *will* be prevented, for surely when once men know and are satisfied that life may be lengthened and misery spared, by avoiding one course and pursuing another, they will not fail so to act. It takes a weary long time to make knowledge general. The fact that cleanliness, light, and pure air are essentially necessary for healthy life, has always been known to the few, but disregarded and not believed by the many. Precise evidence was wanting, and the way to obtain it was not seen. General statements went for nothing. Bad air is not visible; its results are not immediate and tangible, and might have proceeded from other causes. When Clarendon said that, on his return to London with the court after the plague of 1665, he missed very few of his friends and acquaintances who had remained behind, "the ravage having, in a great degree, been confined to the lowest orders of the people, who, in that age, lived in circumstances of great filth and foul air," it led to no general alteration, nor did a thousand similar general statements made before and since, as although incontrovertible facts, they carried no conviction with them, nor could their utterers give it.

During these last six years, evidence of a different kind has been systematically obtained: the truth is apparent, and all that is needed is to make this truth universally known and understood. There is evidence enough and to spare,—evidence unshakeable. In certain districts where the drainage is bad, cesspools abundant, the houses dark and confined, fresh air not to be had, out of every 300 beings ten die every year; in another, where the circumstances are better, in the same number only six die.† Improve the drainage of the first, make such arrangements as shall give the inhabitants better air, and to the extent to which this is done the rate of mortality is made to approach that of the second. This is no hypothesis: the fact is established.* When once it is brought home to all the world, much will have been done towards a remedy, but even this will not suffice to effect it wholly. Pecuniary interest, and the willingness men have to take the chance that *they* specially may escape, will war against it, and can be overcome only by the interference of Government. A well considered bill of health it is to be hoped we shall have directly the new Parliament meets, with such other legislative enactments as are necessary fully to obtain the desired end, as, for example, the repeal of the abominable window duties (that tax on light, *health*, and MORALITY), the repeal of the duty on bricks, and a revision of the Buildings Act.†

Lord Morpeth when he withdrew his bill last session said, "he could not conclude without expressing his confident assurance, that the subject had taken such deep root in the convictions of the country, that, notwithstanding the difficulties inherent to the question or the imperfections of the individual by whom it might be introduced, it must command its own success."

And there is no doubt it would. But it will require, in order that we may not be forced to wait till time has overcome selfish objectors, and removed the webs spun over men's eyes by the spider prejudice, that it be framed with ability and care, carried forward with zeal and determination, and persisted in to the last. Let Lord Morpeth nail his colours to the mast, inscribed "Delivery from Disease," and the people will not be slow in rallying round them. To use the words of a writer in *Fraser's Magazine*,—"The intelligence of the country is already arrayed in favour of sanatory reform—the press is unanimous in its support—a respectable fraction of the medical profession is embarked, heart and soul, in the cause—the clergy, who are always cautious in committing themselves, are beginning to exert their powerful influence—associations and branch associations are multiplying on all sides—and everywhere the feeling is spreading and strengthening that all delay in this matter is a crime, and that the health and lives, the comfort and the well-being of the people, have been too long the sport of ignorance and incompetence. Those only who have made the public health a study are in a condition to realise the vast results, physical, moral, and economical, which must inevitably flow from a large, comprehensive, and practical measure of sanatory reform; they alone can catch a glimpse of that better and happier future, of which the faint dawn is visible on the horizon, when all orders of men released from the bondage of physical corruption, and made large partakers, for the first time, in the pure elements which God has provided for the sustenance, health, and vigour of their frames, living in the midst of unwonted abundance, enjoying complete freedom of person and action, shall dwell in security and peace under the gentle sway of a benevolent and paternal Government."

It must be a broad bill and a practicable bill, and it will be THE measure of our times, and will place those who perfect and pass it amongst the best benefactors of the human race.

We are ourselves old labourers in the field of sanatory reform, and have watched with no common anxiety the increase of the interest manifested in this subject by the public. The ignorance, however, which still prevails is immense, and the societies organized for the promotion of sanatorial measures must in no degree relax their efforts to remove it.

Speaking of the recent death of a child in Hayes-court, Whitechapel, poisoned by the effluvium from the want of drainage, which has in that same place destroyed many lives, a leading journal said,—"It is hardly credible that in a metropolis like London, where labour, skill, and capital are all immediately at command, human life should be positively sacrificed for *want of a drain*. Such, however, has been the case within the present week, as will be seen from the report of an inquest in our paper of yesterday."

One life? Why hundreds of lives have been sacrificed for want of a drain. And why should we say have been, alone: hundreds are now being destroyed in like manner,—though more silently and slowly, no less surely. Last week three men, going into a sewer at South Shields to clear it out, were thrown into a state of stupor by the gases in the sewer, and one was killed. A few days ago two men, employed to remove some night soil in Russell-street, Brighton, were overcome by the bad air, and were both taken out dead. These, and several similar instances, all within a fortnight, the public can understand; they can see here the work of deleterious gases; but they do not understand, or they pretend they do not, that these same are also more or less destructive of health, though diluted with air something less impure; and under existing want of arrangements these are inhaled by thousands.* Typhus fever, which ought not to be known in England, is one of the results, and carries off thousands annually. Cheap and efficient sewerage, suppression of all cesspools, ample supply of water, the widening of alleys, provision of healthful dwellings for the industrious classes, means of carrying off the products of combustion and vitiated air from all apartments, and of obtaining a good supply of pure air, are desiderata of the utmost consequence to all classes of society. Until we remove some of the enormous physical evils which the want of these involves, we cannot hope greatly to improve the morals or refine the taste of the people.

THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL OF DESIGN.—The turmoil here still continues; Lord Colborne, the president, the two vice-presidents, Mr. Cockerell, and Mr. Etty, have resigned their seats in the council, so that a *quorum* can scarcely be obtained. The statement by some of the papers that the director had resigned his appointment, is we believe, incorrect.

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* "One-sixth of the total waste of life and health which takes place in the United Kingdom, occurs in the Metropolis. Now, waste of life includes unnecessary sickness, widowhood, orphanage, funeral expenses, inability to labour, medical charges—it also includes the cost of the increased relative proportion of births, which is found to result from a high rate of mortality, and likewise increase of poor-rates, additional calls on public and private charity for the support of hospitals, dispensaries, and asylums for the sick and infirm. If an estimate is made of the money value of the losses from a neglect of sanatory measures in London, and if a detailed estimate of Dr. Lyon Playfair, for Manchester, is proceeded upon, it is found that 2,284,331*l.* are wasted every year."—*Report of Health of London Association.*

† We are able to tell what the rate of mortality in London is 1 in 25, while in Liverpool it is 1 in 33. We are able to trace the startling differences to its source. It is one of the reports of the Registrar General, it is stated that the metropolis is divided into three groups of ten districts each, under the title of the healthiest, the medium, and the most unhealthy districts. The result is as follows:—Ten healthiest, with an allowance of 203 square yards to each person, have a mortality of 1 in 45. Ten medium, with an allowance of 108 square yards to each person, have a mortality of 1 in 41. Ten unhealthiest with an allowance of 43 square yards to each person, have a mortality of 1 in 30. Again,—the Rev. Mr. Clay, of Preston, makes four classes of streets:—Well conditioned, mortality among children under 1 year, 15 in 100; moderately, 23 in 100; ill, 28 in 100; worst, 44 in 100, or three times as much as the first; and there we learn from Mr. Chadwick, that in St. George's, Hanover-square, the average age at which the better class die is 45; labourers 27; St. Giles's and St. George's, Bloomsbury—gentry, 38; Liverpool, working class, 17. Such facts as these must speak to all.

‡ It is stated that in twenty streets in Charlton-on-Medlock, Manchester, the mortality fell from 110 to 82 per annum, in consequence of the streets being properly paved and drained. In certain streets in St. George's district, Manchester, the deaths in 1838-1839, amounted to 931; but in 1841-1843, after the streets were paved and sewered, the deaths were only 488, being a diminution of 53 per cent. or about one-eighth.

§ Our recent suggestions for the immediate institution of some specific and determined measure for sweeping away the obnoxious window and brick duties, have been reprinted by our contemporaries all over the country. A pile of letters prove to us how strong the general feeling is against these great obstacles to safety, comfort, structural improvement, cheapness, and health.

* "It appears that decomposing animal refuse gives rise to three distinct gaseous products, each of which may exert injurious and fatal influences. They are sulphuretted hydrogen, hydrosulphuret of ammonia, and nitrogen. The former two are exceedingly deleterious. They may exist either in combination or separately in the soil of privies and cesspools. When combined, their effect is as their effects from those of sulphuretted hydrogen.

Although there are no divided experiments on which we can determine the smallest proportion of this gas which, when mixed with atmospheric air, will destroy life, yet we know that when respired in its pure state, it is almost instantaneously fatal. And that when allowed to remain in contact with the skin, even although a pure air be respired, it will speedily prove fatal. Thenard has found that 1-400th of its volume would destroy a mouse, and that 1-800th in 2½ suffices to destroy a horse. Most certain it is, that an atmosphere, even when only slightly impregnated with this gas will, if long continued to be respired, seriously injure the health of an individual, and cause death."

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